

Introduction to the Philosophy of Human Person

**Quarter 1 – Module 5:
Methods of Philosophizing**

Lesson

5

Methods of Philosophy Lead to Wisdom and Truth



What is It

Our aim in this module is for you to realize that the methods of philosophy can lead you to the truth and eventually to your acquisition of wisdom. Let us first dissect the significant points of Socratic Method which you have just watched via youtube. (Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BiIn_oQQRJk)

1. Socratic Dialectic is one of the methods of philosophizing.
2. Socratic method is a didactic dialogue of questioning that is expressed in the critical examination and cross-examination of the positions of every participant in the dialogue. It is a way to discover the truth. It is neither a rhetoric (art of persuasion) or a debate. This method is also called maieutic or intellectual midwifery.
3. The first thing to do in the acquisition of knowledge is to accept one's ignorance. "It is when we admit that we do not know that there is so much to know, and that the more we know the more that we do not know, and that we begin to seek the truth and acquire wisdom."
4. Socratic Method: 3 steps in arriving at the truth
 - a. Give an initial definition of a thing or a concept. Example: A table is a four-legged furniture.
 - b. Look for characteristics that are not captured in the initial definition. Example: Is the table a cow?
 - c. Give a new definition. Example: A table is a four-legged furniture made up of wood and has a flat surface.

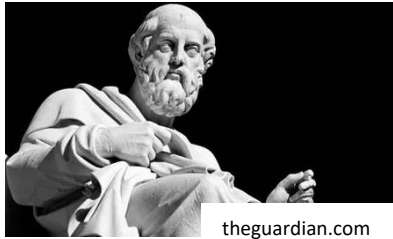
"In following the 3 steps, we arrive at a precise definition and understand its essence. Example: A table is a four-legged furniture made up of wood, has a flat surface, rectangular in shape, and is primarily used for dining or putting things on it."

Another Example:

- c. Freedom is the ability of the human person to do whatever she wants to do.
- d. Am I really free to kill my enemy simply because I hate him?
- e. No, we cannot just kill anybody we want to kill. There are rules to follow in a civilized society.

“With the use of Socratic Method, we can improve our understanding of something and eventually will arrive at the truth.”

Plato's Metaphysical System



Aside from the idea that philosophy is wisdom, the *Platonic* philosophy added that knowledge is wisdom, and virtue is knowledge. *Repeatedly doing what is good will make someone wise.*

It's very interesting to note Plato's concepts of soul, perfect knowledge, and world of forms and ideas. First, Plato perceived the soul having a priori knowledge. It means that before a soul occupies a body, it has been already in existence, and such pre-existing soul possesses perfect knowledge of everything. Eventually, when a soul occupied a body, its knowledge became limited, thus, it was put into the state where it has to search for the truth. Second, he believed that this world is not the basis for the attainment of true and real knowledge since everything in this world is considered as appearance. He assumed the existence of another world in another dimension. Objects of real knowledge must be ageless and eternal. And since the things that we perceive through our senses are always changing, therefore, we cannot have true knowledge. Therefore, there must exist another world where the real objects of knowledge could be found. He called this "the world of forms and ideas".

For example: When we have an idea of, let say, a chair. Plato believed that our mind has this idea of the chair that enables us to recognize that something is a chair when we see one. This idea of the "chairness" of a chair, presumably is based on our knowledge of this form and idea of the chair found in the other dimension, the "world of forms and ideas". Thus, everything that we see in this world is merely a secondary copy of the idea that exist in the other world, which is the ultimate basis for knowledge.

How do we acquire knowledge? Again, Plato would go back to his concept of the soul, i.e., the Soul of every man possesses the power of learning the truth and the organ to see it. Man has innate ability to recognize and remember the perfect knowledge that we had before the soul joined the body, when it was still part of the World Soul. Plato believed that before we were born we had perfect knowledge as part of the World Soul, but the body has the effect of corrupting the soul when they are joined. Thus, the soul forgets the knowledge that it had before joining the body. "Thus, knowledge is nothing but remembrance". In this sense, no knowledge is learned, it is just remembered. Do you agree?

In the hierarchy, the easiest ideas to be recognized by the soul would be ideas about the material objects, followed by mathematical ideas, and then abstract ideas. The highest and the most difficult idea to be recognized is the idea of good. The idea of good is the goal of Plato's philosophy, the attainment of the good life.

Socratic Philosophy



Of necessity, all men desire their happiness, which consists in the possession of what is truly good, that is, of what the intellect perceives as truly good. Good is synonymous with useful (relative good).

Here is the hierarchy of the multiple elements which go to make human good and human happiness: (1) health, beauty, wealth, honor (lowest) – we can live without them; (2) bodily and emotional pleasures – unless regulated they easily lead to excess (Good is in the middle, between excess and deficiency; (3) self-control – it prepares the soul for the possession of the supreme good; and, (4) wisdom and virtue – it is the absolute and supreme good. You are good if you are able to make others good.

Virtue is synonymous with knowledge. The virtuous man is he who has a perfect knowledge of moral goodness and the man of wisdom. Happiness is synonymous with virtue. Man is happy even in this world in proportion as he is virtuous.

Method of Systematic Doubt - Skepticism



Rene Descartes introduced this method of systematic doubt which consists of doubting everything that can be doubted until you arrive at clear and distinct ideas which are non-sensical to doubt. For something to be accepted as one of the starting points or premises of knowledge, an idea must be clear and distinct.

Descartes believed that one of the logically certain premises is the existence of the self, the starting point of knowledge. Even if you doubt everything that can be doubted (eg. you can doubt your parents, if they are really your parents, or your brothers or sisters, if you are really related by blood; or even the existence of things in the other room, if nobody is there to perceive them; you can even doubt your own doubting), you can still be sure about one thing, that you are doubting. Doubting is a form of thinking. Thinking could not happen in a vacuum. There must be an owner of these thoughts. Therefore, thinking implies your existence.

Can you doubt your existence? The answer is “no”. If yes, then you are contradicting yourself. At the moment that you are doubting, then you are existing. Thus, the self exists at the very act of doubting, which is a form of thinking. Descartes put it as: “Cogito, ergo sum or I think therefore I am (exist). The important lesson from Descartes’ skepticism is that never accept the truth of any statement or belief without adequate evidence for it.